Foreign Research: Reuss Criticizes Projects Supported by the United States

Ridiculing federally supported scientific projects is an ancient congressional pastime based on the fact that, ridiculous or not, scientific inquiry often can be made to look ridiculous when cast in lay terms. The practice invariably brings press notice and gives the congressman the politically desirable image of watchdog over federal spending.

Last month, Representative Henry S. Reuss (D–Wis.) made his debut in the business, charging, in a press release, that "despite our balance of payments difficulties, the United States government is adding to the dollar drain by paying foreign scientists some $70 million in support of foreign research projects."

Among the projects, the congressman said, was "$11,000 given this year (total support to date $78,000) by the Office of Naval Research to a Canadian scientist to continue his investigations of the smells of ocean fish." The Canadian, an inquiry reveals, is working on shark repellents for the Navy, and is one of the few, if not the only, researcher conducting comprehensive studies of fish scents. A member of Reuss's staff said the projects were selected from Science Information Exchange listings on the basis of "whether it seemed the work had to be done out of the country," and that no further effort was made to obtain information about the research.

Also assailed by Reuss was $8000 given this year (total support to date, $40,000) by the Army to Australian scientists to "continue their study of perspiration characteristics of Australian aborigines." The Army explained, in response to an inquiry from *Science*, that the study is aimed at determining how aborigines survive and work under extreme environmental conditions, a subject which may have some value for the comfort or survival of troops in harsh climates.

Reuss also raised questions about U.S. support for Lwoff, Monod, and Jacob, the French recipients of last year's Nobel prize for their work in genetic control of enzyme and virus synthesis. Starting in 1949, for two periods totaling approximately 10 years, the three received about $200,000 in support from the National Institutes of Health. Following Reuss's criticism, the private response of NIH officials was that they must be doing something right if 15 years ago they selected for support a team that went on to win the Nobel prize. They point out that a generation of American researchers was trained under the French, and that, for $200,000, the U.S. has won vast affection from the French scientific community at a time when political relations between the two countries have been strained.

The Reuss press release said that, during a major period of support for the French team, "France was prospering and showing large payments surpluses, while the United States was making a determined effort to cut all unnecessary spending abroad. In these circumstances," the congressman was quoted as saying, "surely France should support the research of its scientists." In pure economic terms, the point is a sound one, and the administration has been clamping down on support for foreign scientists. Harsher criteria apply to foreign research proposals, and there is a general rule that work will be supported only if it is of high scientific value and the competence and interest are not available in the United States. However, it is hard to see why NIH should get anything but warm praise for its triumph in France.

As for the $70 million that Reuss charged is spent abroad for scientific

NIH: Freeze on Awards Ends, but Prospect Is for Funds Squeeze

Some uncertainties about National Institutes of Health support of research (*Science*, 31 December) have been cleared away since the first of the year, but the developments will not bring cheer to all aspirants for NIH support.

An order delaying awards of grants recommended in the November meetings of the NIH advisory councils has been rescinded, and notices of awards made with funds from the current budget have been sent out.

The NIH decision to hold up the awards seems to have been prompted by two main considerations: (i) the necessity of shifting agency funds to cover costs of the federal pay raise which went into effect in October and (ii) the advisability of reviewing agency plans in light of the prospective tightening of budgetary reins because of the rising costs of the Vietnam war and Great Society legislation.

The total of funds to be requested for NIH for the fiscal year 1967, which begins 1 July, remains an enigma wrapped in the President's budget. There are signs, nevertheless, that the agency will be allocated a sum very close to this year's billion-dollar budget, with perhaps some cuts in construction funds. Many NIH programs have built-in cost-escalation factors, however, and no increase in money would mean a decrease in activity. The freeze at NIH is likely, therefore, to be followed by a squeeze, particularly affecting research and training programs which are newly proposed or up for extension this year.

Conversations with investigators familiar with NIH-supported work in several universities indicate that the word is already out on the cutting off of "lower-priority" proposals, which in other years probably would have been financed. The greatest visible effect is likely to be on training programs financed by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences and the categorical institutes. Departments in bigger, richer universities and medical schools, it is observed, may be able to absorb the reductions by making shifts in funds and assignments. But in smaller institutions with slimmer resources, the implications for graduate students could be serious.

The President's budget, it must be remembered, is a request for funds. Congress does the appropriating and in the past has been generous to NIH. It remains to be seen how Congress will react in a year when military demands are probably a greater stress factor in the budget process than at any time since Korea.

—JOHN WALSH